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November 20, 2002

The Honorable John D. Ashcroft
Attorney General of the United States
U.S. Department of Justice
10th Street and Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Mr. Attorney General:

I write to ask for an immediate meeting with you so that we may discuss my concerns regarding your reported policy of monitoring the activities of all Iraqi-Americans. I say this as both the Ranking Member of the House Judiciary Committee, and as a Representative of a Congressional District with one of the largest number of Arab-American constituencies in the Nation.

Certainly, I have a very strong concern that the Department's program is tantamount to racial and ethnic profiling – that is identifying an individual for monitoring and surveillance merely because of their nationality or ethnicity, rather than any other underlying suspicion or cause. I believe such a policy violates the constitutional protections of due process and equal protection and would note that both President Bush and yourself are on record as opposing racial profiling.

In addition, I am concerned that your policy unfairly and indiscriminately targets the very individuals whose sympathies we need to fight terrorism. The overwhelming majority of Arab Americans want to help their adopted land fight terrorism wherever it exists. Unfortunately, targeting these individuals as potential terrorists sends a signal that we do not trust them and do not want their support. The fact that many Iraqi-Americans are staunch opponents of Saddam Hussein's regime should give you pause before you further alienate this critical constituency.

We have been down this road of overreaction before. In the wake of every war, groups have had their civil liberties curtailed and been subjected to intolerable deprivations of civil rights, including confinement without credible justification. With the detention and subsequent release without criminal charge of almost 2000 people after the September 11th attacks, I believe

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the Department has already crossed that line. Before we embark on a similar path with Iraqi-Americans, we should pause to reflect on history's assessment of those past policies of guilt by association and their contribution to national security.

I look forward to meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these matters.

Very truly yours,



John Conyers, Jr.
Ranking Member

cc: F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr.